



## Lesson & Activity Ideas for Is Was

by Deborah Freedman

Learn more about Deborah, her books, and find more teaching resources at [www.deborahfreedman.net](http://www.deborahfreedman.net)

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*Dear parents and educators,*

*Full disclosure—I do not have any experience or expertise as a teacher or writer of curriculum! The ideas below come from my process and imagination as an author and illustrator, and I hope that they inspire you to follow up your reading of **Is Was** with one of the hands-on activities here, or one of your own.*

*This is a work in progress. I welcome your input.*

*Many thanks for sharing my book with children!*  
*Deborah*



## Themes

- Change
  - Small, everyday change—
  - More consequential, far-reaching transformation
  - Even while some things change, others stay constant
- Heart
  - Literal “beat” of the text
  - Metaphorical heartbeat of the story
- Loss
- Comfort

## STEAM Activities

- Ecosystems
  - Name 3 different microenvironments in the book
  - Name 3 different kinds of weather in the book—describe the textures used to convey weather
  - Name 3 different times of day—describe the colors used to convey time
  - Identify 6 animals in the book’s ecosystem
    - How do they relate to their physical environments?
    - How do they relate to each other?
    - Which are predators? Which are prey?
    - What sounds do they make?
- Keep a nature journal
  - Make your own journal
    - Recycle! Use recycled cardboard (like an old cereal or shipping box) as the cover & decorate
    - Paper bags can be cut up for sturdy pages
    - Punch holes and bind with twine, string, ribbon, or yarn
  - Listen & describe:
    - What sounds do you hear? List 5 different sounds.
    - Which are natural? Which are human-made?
    - Focus on one natural sound—can you guess what it is?
      - Describe the sound
      - Follow the sound—can you see it? Describe what you see
        - What is it?
        - What is it doing?

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- Look & sketch
  - Observe the sky over one week. Sketch the different kinds of clouds and weather that you see.
  - Watch one spot over the course of a day
    - What activity do you see there?
    - What colors? Do they change during one day?
    - Add more drawings of the same spot in different kinds of weather.
    - Draw the Seasons (draw same spot during each of the four seasons—see [National Geographic's Arts and Crafts](#) ideas)
  - Observe a single kind of animal over one week. Draw all the different things it does.
  - Vary your perspective
    - Climb up and look down
    - Get all the way down on the ground and look up
- Touch
  - Notice different textures
    - Make rubbings of the bark of different trees. How are they different? Can you identify trees by their bark?
    - Make rubbings of leaves. Can you identify trees by the patterns in their leaves?
- Collect natural objects from the ground outside
  - Leaves and flowers can be pressed and put into your nature journal
  - Look up the scientific names for what you've found
- Ask lots of questions... and find the answers!



## Reading & Writing

- Look—follow one animal through the book
  - What sounds does that animal make?
  - What words are in the text that relate to that animal?
  - What words are *not* there? What is? What was? What will happen next?  
*Tell the animal's story in your own words.*
  
- Listen to the world around you—
  - Discuss *onomatopoeia* and its use through the book
  - Write down sounds that you hear
  - Do the sounds you hear spark words?
  - Write a poem using sounds and those words.
  
- Collect natural objects from the ground outside
  - Describe using vivid language
  - Use them as prompts for poems
  
- Make your own list of “is” and “was”
  - Little things that perhaps you never noticed before
  - Think of one big change that felt difficult
  - What helped you through that change?
  - What stays the same? What begins again?
  
- What *will be*?
  - What do you think comes next in this story?



## Further Reading

- **Things That Go Away**, Beatrice Alemagna
- **An Ordinary Day**, Elana K. Arnold & Elizabet Vukovic
- **The Blue House**, Phoebe Wahl
- **Life**, Cynthia Rylant & Brendan Wenzel
- **Goodbye, Friend! Hello, Friend!** Cori Doerrfeld
- **Little Tree**, Loren Long
- **Ten Beautiful Things**, Molly Beth Griffin & Maribel Lechuga
- **Outside, Inside**, LeUyen Pham
- **The Old Truck**, Jarrett Pumphrey and Jerome Pumphrey
- **Making a Friend**, Alison McGhee & Marc Rosenthal
- **Waiting**, Kevin Henkes

For more about the books above, see my "[Guide to Picturebooks About Change](#)" posted on Instagram!

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